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Aging: Difficult Choices

Aging is a broad topic, and one which is receiving increasing attention as the "aged" North American population increases in proportion to other age groups. This issue of *Report* focuses on choices which families must make about the care of aged members. It touches on areas such as housing, preserving the independence of elderly persons, balancing the needs and interests of extended family members, medical care, and respite for family care-givers. The stories and articles in this issue also give us an opportunity to reflect on our values and on how they impact the choices we make regarding care.

Many of us struggle with conflicting values as we make decisions about care for the aged. For example, contemporary North American society values individual freedom and independence while a decision to care for one's parents at home, rewards notwithstanding, requires giving up certain freedoms. Decision-making becomes even more complex when extended family members live far apart and when caring for aging parents must be balanced with other responsibilities or commitments.

The aged have their struggles too. Some may choose institutional care because they "don't want to be a burden" to children or other family members, or because interpersonal conflict makes living with a particular family member undesirable. Some find a church retirement center the ideal place to grow old. On the other hand, residents of one fine Christian retirement community have shared with me their sense of loneliness at living their final days apart from family, and I have wondered "should this be?" The stories by Winifred Worman, Lynette Wiebe and Margaret Hudson illustrate some of these issues.



Whatever our decisions regarding care for the aged, many of us will, at some point or other, experience feelings of guilt—guilt at not doing enough for our parents, at neglecting our children's needs while attending to those of our parents, at being a burden to our children, at making what we may feel in retrospect was a wrong decision.

Madeleine L'Engle deals sensitively with the subject of guilt in *The Summer of the Great-Grandmother*. The article by Ruth Enns also offers, indirectly, some ways of easing the sense of guilt as well as suggesting ways in which our congregations can respond to the needs of the aged and those who care for them. This issue of *Report* only scratches the surface of a complex area. Your responses and suggestions for future issues on this topic are welcome!—
Janette Engle Lewis

Janette Engle Lewis is a member of the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns, representing the Brethren in Christ Church. She and her husband live in Alexandria, Virginia.

He made life easier for us, and he made life harder—just the way each person in a family does. I cannot imagine growing up in any other way.

If there was tough, back-and-forth argument about having Grandpa become a permanent part of our family, we children never saw it. It seemed perfectly natural for him to live with us because otherwise he would have been alone, and who would want to be so alone? He was as much a part of our family as were my sister and I.

Joining our family at a relatively young age (64 years), Grandpa kept busy with projects. He built a playhouse for us. We were not allowed to peek out the windows to see what the hammering was all about. He put in the garden, fixed rain gutters, built foot scrapers and bike stands, and pumped up basketballs. He was always there.



Grandpa loved to work—he couldn't imagine living and not working. Almost until his death he volunteered as a bookbinder at CMBC. He bound books of all sorts, his favorites being old Bibles that held family histories and memories.

Besides this regular half day of work, Grandpa was involved in the church and the community. When we all moved to London, Ontario in 1967, Grandpa got involved in building for the church daycare center.

The community senior citizens' group was good for him, although he was a little embarrassed by the attention he received from the single women there. He seemed to realize that there were tricks to keeping young. He challenged his mind with puzzles. He read. He collected things. Nature was a constant thrill.

by Lynette Schroeder Wiebe

Growing Up With Grandpa

"Daddy, why is Mom leaving us here?" we asked my Dad as Mom's plane left in a rush for Canada, leaving Dorothy and I in Germany under his loving, but somewhat harried care. "Your Grandma died, and she is going home to the funeral, and to help Grandpa get through these hard days."

One of the earliest events in my life that I recall, involved my Grandpa Bartel. My Dad, nearing the completion of his doctorate in Hamburg, was left with my sister and me, ages five and seven. After a short time in Canada, Mom realized she was unable to leave Grandpa on his own after Grandma's sudden passing.

Dorothy and I were sent back to Canada, where we moved into Grandpa Bartel's house in Drake, Saskatchewan. We little girls spoke no English, and so babbled around the house, playing, singing and being our normal noisy selves. At that point, Grandpa must have sensed that being part of noise and activity was the thing that would keep him going after Grandma's death.

When my Dad returned from Germany to begin his new job at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC), Grandpa moved to Winnipeg with us. He purchased some things for the house that we would have otherwise done without. Access to his car made our lives easier.

Grandpa babysat us regularly. He planted potatoes in the front yard—"so the grass would grow better someday"—and embarrassed us. He had the biggest bedroom because he had a television. He stomped around the house if we slept too long in the morning. He wouldn't stop for coffee when we went shopping because it was "wasteful".

Every year in June he waited and waited for the wren to nest in the house on the wash line. His optimism and pessimism warred within him and he'd say, "Maybe the wren won't be back this year, because we moved the playhouse too close to it." But the wren came, and Grandpa listened, and optimism was regained.

As Grandpa aged, things subtly changed. There were times when he was angry for no apparent reason.

The last year with Grandpa was very hard. He had been an integral part of our family for over 20 years and we had stored up memories and stories aplenty to keep us going in the down times. Aging is a sad and beautiful process.

The years that showed on his lined face and the tremor in the hands that had built, sheltered, protected, and cared for us touched us all. His eyes looked out from his bed and longed to be where the voices were in the kitchen. He was still a part of our family, but he felt separated from us. The loneliness of his illness and increasing fragility of his body made him alternately angry, indignant and sad.

Mom and Dad began to lose sleep. The nights grew longer and longer for Grandpa and he couldn't stand his own fears in the night. He fretted and worried over everything and everyone he no longer had the ability to affect. It was hard for my parents. If there had been other choices for us—senior citizen's residences or church homes—we might have made different decisions; perhaps my Mom and Dad would have enjoyed more freedom in their lives. And yet, when I look at growing up in our home, I'm glad for the decisions my parents made that allowed our lives to be richer and fuller because Grandpa was always there.

A few weeks before Grandpa died, he was moved to the hospital. Mom and Dad visited him with clear eyes and rested minds. The long road ended peacefully and we all share the memories of our lives together. At his funeral we rejoiced in his life and then drove to Drake to bury him under the good soil of Saskatchewan. Every year in June we find ourselves remembering the time of Grandpa dying. June 6 is a day for remembering. We are sad for a while, and then, by the end of June the wren sings in the garden and we rejoice.

The extended family is important to me and to my own family. In 1980 my husband Ernie Wiebe and our children at that time, Rebecca and David, moved into the house where I grew up. Mom, Dad and Grandpa all helped make the decision to have us move in with them. Grandpa Bartel was still with us until June 6, 1982. It was my own



experience in growing up in an extended family that made me aware of the vital trade-offs that come about in this living situation. My own children are continually loved by two more caring adults, there is a safety net for frustration levels (Grandma comes with cookies for my kids when I get frazzled), and there are more ears to listen to the hurts and happiness of childhood. Our family now includes David and Mildred (Bartel) Schroeder, Ernie and Lynette (Schroeder) Wiebe, Rebecca (11), David (9), Daniel (5), and twenty tadpoles. Shalom.

Lynette Schroeder Wiebe, her husband and children, are currently living in Taipei, Taiwan, where they are completing a two-year teaching stint at Bethany Elementary School. During this period, Lynette's parents are sharing their Winnipeg home with a young family.



by Esther Mary Walker

Beatitudes for Friends of the Aged

Blessed are they who understand
my faltering step and palsied hand.
Blessed are they who know that my ears today
must strain to catch the things they say.
Blessed are they who seem to know
that my eyes are dim and my wits are slow.
Blessed are they who looked away
when coffee spilled at table today.
Blessed are they with a cheery smile
who stop to chat for a little while.
Blessed are they who never say,
"You've told that story twice today."
Blessed are they who know the ways
to bring back memories of yesterdays.
Blessed are they who make it known
that I'm loved, respected and not alone.
Blessed are they who know I'm at a loss
to find the strength to carry the Cross.
Blessed are they who ease the days
on my journey Home in loving ways.

by Winifred H. Worman

The "Sandwich Generation"

Some of us are sandwiched between competing demands: coping with delayed adulthood for our children, caring for aging parents, retirement planning for ourselves, and maintaining personal careers.

Our generation may have parents in the "old old" group (over 85) and we may have children who have had prolonged years of higher education and are just now ready to enter careers and professions. Or, we are the children of parents who were very young when we were born. During our lifetime, the age gap has narrowed and now the 68-year-old daughter and the 85-year-old mother are more like sisters! Any of these family constellations can present delightful experiences as well as frustrating dilemmas.

In the ideal family, everyone is relatively healthy up to the time of death. Family relationships accommodate naturally to the inevitable decline in physical activity and responsibilities. But when there is a marked decline in the health of the "young old" before the "old old" experiences similar decline, the equilibrium is upset.

In today's society, where extended families may not live in the same geographical area, the issues of providing care for the aging are multidimensional. Maintaining independence as long as possible is certainly of prime importance. To achieve independence in activities of daily living may still require someone else to care for the environment—repairs to dwelling, heavy cleaning duties, grocery shopping, transportation to church and social events. The issues to be considered include financial resources and personnel resources within the immediate family, including intergenerational family members.



Long life is the reward of the righteous; gray hair is a glorious crown. Proverbs 16:31

As the aging person's ability to provide self care decreases, the alternative solutions are considered. One solution is to provide a home for the aging parent within the community where that parent has social and church connections. Removing the older person to an entirely new location may lead to loneliness and withdrawal in the isolation that might occur, especially if the other adults have employment outside the home. Whatever the decision, it is imperative that each generation of the family who will be affected by the decision be involved in the process.

My personal experience with this process began more than ten years ago when my parents, still in their 70's and in reasonably good health, made a very important decision for themselves and for us, their children. They decided to sell their multi-storied home and move to a church retirement community. Together they sorted through their mementos, appraised each piece of furniture, gardening tools, kitchen utensils, etc. as to significance and whether or not it would fit or be useful in a smaller home. Certainly this process was painful at times—the recognition that one stage of their lives was ending and a new one beginning.

Moving into the retirement community did not end their involvement in their local church. They chose a center within an easy drive of their home church and circle of friends. However, the retirement center became the focus of their daily activities and they found a group of new friends from other denominations and from other parts of the country.

As their physical activity has declined, the retirement center's chapel has become their home church, either by television or by personal attendance. The connection to church friends of many years and the opportunity to meet new friends has given them a stimulating, yet protected environment.

For us, their children (who live 800 miles away), this decision by them has been a unique gift to us. We enjoy having them visit us for extended periods, as their health permits, and they enjoy the independence of maintaining their small retirement home. When they need assistance with daily living needs, we know there is immediate help available. We are able to continue with our professional lives and make plans for our own retirement because they have said to us, "We do not want to be dependent on you, if we can possibly help it."

What does the future hold? Should either of them require skilled nursing care, the transition would, of course, be difficult. But, already there is a support system built

in—staff, friends within that close-knit community who would assist in the changes required for such a move.

As a result of my parents' modeling during this rite of passage, my husband and I are making a similar decision. Our children lead busy lives with their families and careers in distant points from our home. To choose a retirement point close to any of them could be difficult, since employment and opportunities can change locations.

Nearing the end of our formal employment in our professions, our choice for retirement is a retirement community also. We hope that with continued good health, opportunities for service in our professions will continue in a different setting—a volunteer organization. Our base of operation will be the retirement center cottage.

We believe we will remain connected to our children, grandchildren, parents, by telephone, letters and visits and that we will achieve the same goals that our parents have set and accomplished so well:

- sustain connectedness to our heritage.
- contribute to society as long as capability allows.
- maintain relationships with our children and grandchildren.
- remain independent within the parameters of an organized retirement center. ●

Winnifred H. Worman lives in Columbus, Ga. and recently retired from the position of assistant dean of the school of nursing at Auburn University. She and her physician husband anticipate returning this year to Macha Mission Hospital in Zambia, where they served under Brethren in Christ Missions in the 1960's.



by Margaret Lorraine Hudson

Caring in the Home: A Daughter's Perspective

Life could hardly have afforded a more gentle closure on a generation than that which I have just experienced. Some of my friends suggest that I am still too close to evaluate, and perhaps they are right. A certain numbness has blocked out the harsher experiences.

It was 18 years ago I came back home with four young sons and a critically ill husband. I found on the acre where I grew up the security I needed during that difficult period. My husband and I had spent ten years in Korea teaching for a government university, so had few benefits to meet family needs during the crisis.

Shortly after arriving home, Mom's hip gave way from osteoporosis and she ended up in a wheelchair. It was obvious she could no longer care for the home and the acre. Dad, in his 70's, was completely engrossed in his new consumer/producer cooperative and other retired teacher's activities. "We always planned for you to have the acre," Mom said, so Dad designed and we had built for them a lovely little apartment on the old house. It had lots of glass and an open beam ceiling.

We settled into the old house. The boys and I took over care of the acre. There was conflict, for it was hard to meet all of Grandpa's expectations, but he played a positive role in the boys' lives during their father's illness.

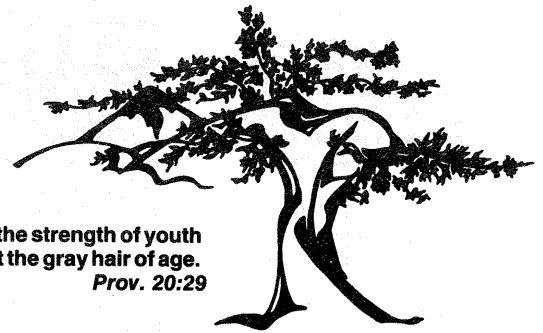
I developed my love of clay into a now thriving business, the acre giving me the launching pad I needed. In return, the folks had a brand new home and the assurance they could stay on the acre. To the very end they enjoyed the lovely shade trees and fresh fruit from the orchard they had planted and tended—and family was always around.

At first the folks were almost completely independent. My growing clay business gave me the freedom to take Mom for doctor's appointments and the like. Dad cared for most things except for getting Mom ready for bed at night. I took care of that. He did most of the cooking for many years. Mom washed dishes, did laundry, and tidied the house. As needs changed, I took meals in to them, or invited them over. During the later years, at least part of the household ate the evening meal with them, helping to relieve a growing sense of isolation. All the holiday and company gatherings were held there. My Dad lost his speech the last two years, so right up to the end, Mom said grace, never missing a word, even though she was completely confused about everything else!

Meanwhile, I had the business to tend to, my own sculpting to do, and the children to care for. There was little time to think. With the children now off to college and my marriage ending, for a short period I discovered the joy of traveling with friends!

And then came the painful loss of that freedom as the folk's health deteriorated. Yet an amazing thing happened. Confined to home, I did an incredible amount of growing in my personal art. With intercom attached, I worked out in my orchard studio from 5 or 6 a.m. until I heard someone stir, and went in to check on them. Bessie arrived at 8:30 to care for Mom and Dad through the day. By noon I was on such a "high" from sculpting that I could care for whatever demands the situation placed on me. During this period, my sister and I each paid for one week of care; the remainder came out of the folks retirement.

By evening I was tired and not very "chatty," so I took Mom for rides in the wheelchair and then the three of us played dominoes. After that came the nightly ritual of sitz bath and preparation for bed. "I just love to be waited on!" Mom commented many times. Since by then she was in her mid-nineties, she felt she really deserved it. The



We admire the strength of youth
and respect the gray hair of age.
Prov. 20:29

bathroom was small and crowded. I hated climbing back and forth over the wheelchair.

I felt a lot of disappointment from my Dad, mainly in that I hadn't become a great painter as he dreamed I would, but more immediately because I was too tired at night to carry on stimulating conversations—as he had done throughout his life. Not able to speak, he spent most of his time sleeping, reading, or working on his retired teacher's projects. His mind was crystal clear until the end.

At 90, he was utterly delighted that his driver's license was renewed for another four years. He drove like a demon! But shortly after that he lost his energy.

Mom suffered from boredom much more than Dad. We used the Friendly Visitor program, but Mom complained that Dad monopolized all the conversations, even when he had to write everything out!



As Mom's problems got worse, we occasionally took advantage of Medicare nursing assistance. She enjoyed their visits, and she enjoyed Bessie as time went on, but she still suffered. "I need more meaningful work to do!" was her constant complaint, although she soon tired of anything offered. Although she could do little, her mind still told her she should be busy! Most of her friends were gone and she enjoyed neither the telephone nor the television. For many years, my sister had come for a few days every month or so to visit. Now she came regularly to spell off Bessie and me. Church friends offered to help out during more difficult periods.

After an episode with his heart (the pacemaker was defective) Dad refused to go to the hospital. I didn't force him, but by afternoon he agreed he should probably see his doctor. That night, when I brought him home, he wept for joy at being back home with Mom. Apparently he had refused to go earlier in the day because he was afraid of being put in a nursing home. He had conducted a retired teacher's survey of local nursing homes and had developed an intense dread of them. He had heard terrible stories of the "finest" people "abandoning" their family elders. I always felt from him a certain distrust, no matter what I said.

Finally, the skin on Dad's heel broke down. Years of swollen feet left no resistance to the onslaught of infection. I soaked and bandaged every morning and night, and watched the slow, painful progress of gangrene. I had Medicare nursing supervision. I didn't realize I did it for myself, but on three occasions those last six months, I bought for the folks a large cymbidium orchid in full bloom! The flowers lasted for months—and for me those lovely flowers from K-Mart helped transform my task!

The two of them laid side by side in hospital beds in the living room. Mom was constantly calling for me, and for what seemed like hours at a time let out involuntary bellowing calls. Dad would look up from his bed, out through the clear story windows he had planned, at the giant trees and the sky, and beaming with delight he would write, "This is such a beautiful space!" His pride in his architectural creation was obvious, as was his pride in the acre. We had round-the-clock care for the last month of his life, and then for Mom a few months later.

They died peacefully in their sleep, at 91 and 97. Both had made it clear that they wanted no extraordinary means used to keep them alive at the end. Even so, it was hard to assume responsibility for saying "No" to medical professionals on questions of further treatment. I consulted with my brother and sister often, but in the end, there were always decisions I had to make. Once, when my Dad was choking from mucus, I forced him to take one of his pills. It worked wonderfully, but later he wrote, "When will you let me escape from this body of death?"

• **Women in Ministry**

• **Kathrine and Edwin Remple** became pastors of University Mennonite Church, State College, Pa., in the fall. They served previously at Pueblo (Colo.) Mennonite Church.

• **Carmen and Luke Schrock-Hurst** became pastors of Richmond (Va.) Mennonite Fellowship recently. They served previously with MCC in Central America.

• **Pauline Kennel** was honored for seven years of service as coordinator of Chicago Area Mennonites at a special service held at Lawndale Mennonite Church. It reflected the diversity of worship styles found in the 23 congregations of Mennonites in the Chicago area. Kennel is now devoting her energies to church planting, along with husband LeRoy, in suburban Schaumburg and to real estate work.

• **Carol Harrison** became assistant editor of *The Christian Leader* in September. She was editor of the Fresno Pacific College paper for two years and did writing for the college public relations office before taking this position.

• **Sharon Schmidt** of El Dorado, Kan., was one of two Kansas teachers chosen for the 1988-1989 First Year Teacher Award, sponsored by the

Student Loan Marketing Association. She is presently a math teacher at El Dorado High School.

• **Grace Nolt** is the new publications editor and alumni coordinator at Eastern Mennonite High School, Harrisonburg, Va. She is a 1989 graduate of Eastern Mennonite College and was assistant director of EMC Summer Programs the last two years.



by Ruth N. Enns

Caring for the Care-Givers

Do I have any regrets? I have none so far as my relationship to my parents is concerned. I would have wanted it no other way. But at the same time I began to nurse my father's feet, my third son came home, suffering from hallucinations. He immediately began working with a fine therapist, but my own attention was divided. Three months after his grandfather's death, while I cared for Mom, now hovering between life and death, my talented, rugged, handsome 26-year-old son took his own life. One cannot but wonder....

Now, months later, I am in the process of fixing up the folks' apartment for myself. I love it dearly, and fight guilt on occasion for such utter delight! The bathroom is transformed—it has a tub with grab bars and jets, a handicapped-height toilet, a pocket door, and plenty of room for a wheelchair if that is ever needed. At 62 I intend to work at sculpting for another good 30 years. During those years, and at the end, I want it to be as easy for myself—and anyone else—as possible! •

Margaret Lorraine Hudson returned to her childhood home in Fresno, Calif. in 1970. She started a business working in clay—*Earth Art Studio*—which now employs eight people. Margaret continues to do her own sculpting in her backyard.

When our family moved to an older neighborhood of Fresno in 1972 I became acquainted with a number of elderly persons, mostly widows, with whom I enjoyed visiting. At about the same time my occupation changed from elementary school teaching to the renovation of turn of the century homes. Casual visiting with our elderly neighborhood friends turned to assisting them with minor home repairs, painting and papering. As these persons became less able to completely manage their daily activities, conversations frequently included the comment that help that they could trust was not only hard to find, but difficult to pay for as well.

With the rise in interest rates and the rapid increase in the cost of housing in the early 1980's I felt that it was time for another career change and my favorable experience with elderly persons led me to investigate options in that area. I decided to pursue a master of science degree in health science administration, with an emphasis in gerontology.

A few months after beginning the program, my mother, who was becoming increasingly more dependent physically, came to live with us one month out of every three. Our oldest daughter moved to the area and took a part-time job so that she could relieve me when I had to attend classes. Fortunately, this arrangement worked well and I was able to finish studies on schedule. My thesis project was the development of a proposed program of in-home care services for elderly persons with modest incomes, using a voluntary service model.

- **Mary Herr** was ordained by Indiana-Michigan Conference as a spiritual director and counselor in September. She and her husband Gene operate The Hermitage retreat center near Three Rivers, Mich.
- **Elaine Moyer** has been appointed acting principal at Christopher Dock Mennonite High School, Lansdale, Pa., during the one-year sabbatical of Elam Peachey. Moyer joined the Christopher Dock faculty in 1983 as a physical education instructor and became assistant principal in 1986.
- **Sarah Derstine** has been appointed admissions counselor at Hesston College. She served previously as food services supervisor at Sunnyside Retirement Community in Harrisonburg Va. She is a 1987 Hesston graduate.
- **Mary Oyer** began a part-time position at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries this fall as interim professor of church music. She is a former longtime music professor at Goshen College.

Fresno Pacific College, located in a census tract with an unusually high concentration of aged persons, saw the need to expand the social work major to include an emphasis in services for the elderly. A federal grant was used to initiate a program. I was invited to implement the program that I had outlined in my thesis to serve as a laboratory for social work students. To provide a wider range of experiences for the students, an adult day care program for dependent persons was added. The Older Adult Social Services program, known as OASIS, was begun in the fall of 1983.

In the six years of operation, OASIS has grown from a program providing 7,000 hours of care annually to providing more than 50,000 hours this past year. In 1987 a one-day-a-week program was added in Reedley. In 1988, we moved from our original location in Butler Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church to a residence across from Fresno Pacific College. The move gained for us the use of three bedrooms, a kitchen, office space, and an enclosed back yard. The move also permitted us to add a third type of service, weekend overnight care.

Though the OASIS program is both a service and an educational program of the college, local congregations are heavily involved. The Coordinating Board is made up mostly of persons from the Fresno Mennonite congregations, and the volunteers who provide transportation, visiting, and telephoning services are members of local churches. The staff, with the exception of a few of the part-time student home care workers, are all active members of congregations, as are the volunteers and quarter time director of the Reedley program. The project is viewed as a service offering by the church to the community.

The adult day care services were first seen as a means of stimulation and socialization for isolated elderly persons. As the program has developed, it appears that our greatest service is to the family care givers of the increasingly frail elderly. The majority of the participants are in the later stages of Alzheimer's Disease and time off for the caregivers allows them to keep their dependent, confused spouse or parents at home rather than institutionalizing them.

This involvement with the care givers of the dependent elderly has led me to question the focus of the services our congregations typically provide for the elderly. Only 5 percent of the aging population requires institutionalization, yet homes for the aged have consumed the major portion of our resources, our time for visitation

and volunteering. Another 80 percent of those past age 65 are capable of caring for themselves and can make full use of the regular programs of the church as well as provide many of its services. This leaves about 15 percent of the elderly needing care. Nationally 13 percent of this care is provided by family members, most often another person past 65 years of age. These caregivers of the frail elderly are often overlooked as programs for the aged are planned.

Church visitation is often centered around those with acute illnesses, who will recover in due time, and those in nursing homes. The needs of the caregiver are often not recognized though the 24-hour care of a confused or physically frail person is very confining and demanding. A regular time of relief from constant care giving can help to prevent the provider from becoming ill and may postpone the institutionalization of the dependent one. Of course this is not unique to church members, but it is an area of service that the church can provide to the community.

There are several ways that the church can reach out not only to the caregivers of their own congregations, but to the community at large. Any activities must be preceded by an awareness of the many aged who have needs that are not being met. The pastors and deacons may need to do some probing to discover how great the needs are, because they are not always easily voiced. Solutions to the problems of the elderly and their caregivers should not be the responsibility of the professional staff or even the well elderly, but of a cross section of the congregation.

An adult day care program that meets just one day a week might be a good way to start. The church social hall or a smaller lounge can be used and the program can be staffed by volunteers. If sack lunches are brought, there is very little expense to the church. Activities do not require highly trained personnel and can include exercise, music, current events and reminiscence discussions, Bible Study, table games and some crafts. Assistance for implementing such



a service is available from books on church programs for the elderly and by visiting adult day care sites. The program may be expanded to include more days when community response requires it.

Another possibility is the development of a support group which hopefully could lead to a care sharing program, where two families with similar needs are matched and encouraged to exchange regular care times. Care givers often feel that their problems are unique and that no one else would be able to meet the needs of their family member. The support group would help to dispel some of this discomfort and also provide answers for some of the more tricky problems as solutions are shared.

Another suggestion is an "adopt a grandparent" type of program that would include older couples consisting of a dependent person and a caregiver. The lack of social opportunities is often voiced by caregivers. Friends of long standing frequently no longer visit or invite when conversations and activities become difficult because of Alzheimer's Disease or other forms of confusion. Families with children whose grandparents live far away need interaction with aged persons and need exposure to some of the problems as well as the joys of grandparents. After visiting has been well established, the younger family could provide some regular respite time for the caregiver. The caregiver could include the children in some activities to give the young parents time away also. The arrangement can be rewarding for all concerned.

These are just a few ways in which a sizable portion of the aged among us can be assisted. There are others that may be more suitable for persons in your congregation. Becoming aware that there are needs in the church that are not being met is the first step toward providing support and respite for family caregivers. ●

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The Summer of the Great-Grandmother

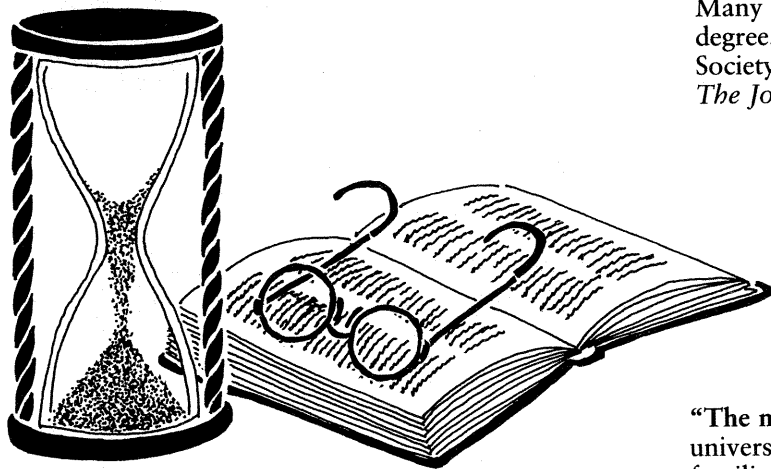
by Madeleine L'Engle

I realize, with a pang, how privileged we are to be able to keep my mother with us. This is how it should be, but what would I do if we lived in a tiny house and did not have the girls and Clara to help? Would I be able to keep her with us, or would I have to put her in a "home"—what an obscene misuse of a word! Homes for the aged, nursing homes, are one of the horrors of our time, but for many people there is no alternative. And even though we have room, and the girls to help us, there are still those who think that my mother should be put away. Put away. Everything in me revolts at the thought. But my belief that we are supposed to share all of life with each other, dying and decaying as well as feasting and fun, is being put to the test. (p. 28)

"Many old people are depressed because they lack loving friends and relatives. It's amazing how they come alive with proper social stimulation." Russell T. Hitt, age 83, "Some Thoughts on Aging," September 1988 Eternity

We bring nothing with us into the world, and certainly we can take nothing out. We die alone. But I wish that most deaths today did not come in nursing homes and hospitals. Death is an act which should not happen in such brutal settings. Future generations may well regard our hospitals and "rest" homes and institutions for the mentally ill with as much horror as we regard bedlam. (p.41)

Obviously, nursing homes have not caused senility in the elderly; but when grandmother or great-grandmother continued to live with the larger family, to be given meaning because she could at least stir the soup or rock the baby, the climate for growing old and dying was more healthy than it is today. (p. 194) •



"Most of us face dying in hospitals, alone in a sea of strangers for whom our dying is often seen as a discomfiting failure. Caregivers in hospitals may well be more likely to prolong dying thoughtlessly than to serve dying people well. Little wonder that many prefer to die by physician-assisted euthanasia than to face chronic and progressive illness and disability without appropriate supportive services." Joanne Lynn, of George Washington University, is medical director of the Washington Home and Hospice. (Washington Post, July 25, 1989.)

One very hot new field in health care is gerontology. It is unique in that it can be approached in a number of different ways. The graying of the population has led to an examination of the special needs of the elderly population, and those needs must be addressed by a number of different professionals.

Social workers are needed to work with elderly patients and their children and spouses. "With the average life expectancy now at 72 years, increasing numbers of working couples with aging parents or relatives are faced with the need for eldercare," says Margaret Magnus, editor/associate publisher of *Personnel Journal*.

Physical audiologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and gerontology nurses will also be needed to address these special needs.

Many of these career paths require only a bachelor's degree. For more information, write the Gerontology Society, 1835 K St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006. (From *The Journal*, August 14-16, 1989, p. 3).

"The major impetus for active euthanasia...is the nearly universal lack of access for dying persons and their families to effective supportive care. Many persons merely need pain control, emotional support, spiritual counseling, respect, enduring relationships, reliable housing and other attributes of tolerable living while they are dying. Ordinarily, our systems of health care and social services...do not make such services available.

by Jenny Joseph

A Poem

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves,
And satin sandals, and say "We've not money for butter."

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired,
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells,
And run my stick along public railings,
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.

I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.



But maybe I ought to practice a little now,
So people who know me are not too shocked or surprised
When suddenly I am old and start to wear purple.

Letters

- The Women and Cancer issue (No. 85) arrived the day before my father was diagnosed with lymphoma. The articles gave me great courage to face the diagnosis and the treatment following. Thanks so much!
—Donna Jost, Hesston, Kan
- I work as an MCC volunteer in Burkina Faso, West Africa, and look forward to every issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. Each topic covered has been interesting and thought-provoking even in a non-Western setting.
—Chloe Grasse, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- I've been reading *Report* for the last several years and have almost always enjoyed their content. The issue on domestic help (No. 79) was of great interest to me as a richer person living among people of a much lower economic level.

I found each article quite interesting, but what mystified me was the quote on the top of page 10 by Marcel Mause. I do not know if he said this in a particular context that makes his statement meaningful, but it escapes me as to why you decided to publish it.

• The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns is looking for a replacement for Irene Loewen of Fresno, Calif. who has served on the committee since 1983. The three year position is open to a Mennonite Brethren woman from the United States. We are particularly interested in a woman who currently lives in the west. For more information contact Christine Wenger Nofisnger, MCC, Box 500, Akron, PA., 17501-0500.

There are so many scripture references exhorting us to give to the poor and needy that I do not see why it would not apply to domestic help, of whom the large majority come from a poorer class than that of the employer.

I believe this issue as well as other issues could benefit from a brief focus on scripture relating to the issue at hand. Most major figures of the Old Testament have servants, Jesus' parables make extensive use of the master/servant relationship and there is advice in the prophets, proverbs, and the epistles for the employer/employee relationship. The word of God is living and it does have relevance for every situation we face in life, including the area of domestic help.

If we are indeed seeking a Christian response to domestic help, as the title suggests, then it seems only logical to me that we as Christians check to see what the Bible says first before we start tossing around our own opinions.

This issue could also have benefited from a brief discussion on the definition of maternalism/paternalism. I found myself confused when one author called giving a Christmas gift to the girls of her worker maternalism. I have a hard time figuring out the difference between this and the Christmas bonuses and health plan benefits that many employees in North America receive. If giving without thought of return is maternalism then Jesus calls us to be maternalistic!

I have not solved all problems involved with giving and receiving among the poor. I struggle with the rest of you in trying to discern what actions and attitudes are edifying for the recipient of the gift and what is demeaning and how to work out solutions in our particular contexts.

May God be with you.
—Anne Garber, Orodara, Burkina Faso

We encourage and invite letters from readers that speak to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in Report. Although we try to print all letters, some may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, although writers may request to have their names withheld.

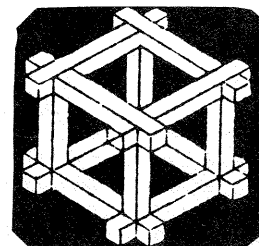
News and Verbs

- The CWC endorses the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), a project of the World Council of Churches. The Decade aims at:

1. *Empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church.*
2. *Affirming—through shared leadership and decision-making, theology and spirituality—the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities.*
3. *Giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.*
4. *Enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism; from teachings and practices that discriminate against women.*
5. *Encouraging the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.*

- A resource booklet with prayers, poems and stories from across the globe, as well as other resources are available from World Council of Churches, U.S. Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015.

- **MCC is recruiting for a Personnel Development Administrator in Akron.** Qualifications for the position include academic background and/or experience in personnel development and sensitivity to the concerns of women, minorities and support staff.
- **The Committee on Women's Concerns is gathering stories on women and codependency for an upcoming issue of Report.** If you have a personal story to share or if you are a professional willing to do a book review, please contact Chris Wenger Nofsinger, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500 by March 15, 1990.
- A third watercolor print in the "Mennonite Women in Service" series is available from Mennonite Board of Missions. The painting, done by artist Judy Hall of Woodburn, Ore., features Miriam Krantz, a longtime MBM worker in Nepal. Some 474 limited edition prints are available for \$30 each (plus \$5 postage/handling) from the MBM Church Relations Department, Box 370, Elkhart, IN 46515. Proceeds will go to Krantz's nutrition work. Previous prints were of MBM worker Karen Amstutz of Bolivia, and MCC worker Brenda Hostetler Meyer of Lesotho.
- *With Passion and Compassion, Third World Women Doing Theology*, Ed. Virginia Fabella and mercy Amba Oduyoye, Orbis, 1988, \$11.95, 192 pp.
This essay book is a compilation of presentations from the 1986 International Women's Conference in Oaxtepec, Mexico. A common experience of poverty, multiple oppression and tokenism links these essays, written by women teachers, theologians, and administrators from various denominations. The theological concepts expressed come from deep biblical study, honed by persecution resulting from political conflict or economic hardship. Presentors come from a variety of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- **In two thirds of all marriages, women are beaten at least once;** one-fourth of the women in this country are beaten weekly; 20 percent of all the emergency medical services are given to women following a beating; 25 percent of all female suicide attempts are a result of repeated domestic beatings; 25 percent of all female murder victims are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends. A woman in this country is beaten every 18 seconds and raped every three minutes. Pornographers make \$4 billion every single year on the abuse of women. Violence toward women in the U.S. and in many countries is not sometimes. Violence against women is always. (Chittister, 1988, p. 5)
- **In Alaska, Archbishop Francis Hurley authorized a Catholic nun to perform a wedding ceremony in Valdez.** The first valid Catholic wedding performed by a nun in his diocese, and perhaps the nation, was performed by the nun because the Archbishop was unable to fly to the wedding on time due to inclement weather.
- **"Feminism is just good common sense and simple justice, and not some strange political movement.** Feminism is empowering women to speak out on their needs and concerns, based on their own experience and knowledge. Feminism is organizing women for change—change that will benefit not only women, but all Canadians. Feminism is an equal share for women, no more, no less." The Honorable Monique Begin, P.C., Joint Chair in Women's Studies, Universities of Ottawa and of Carleton.
- **In Philadelphia, 182 Episcopalian bishops have agreed to preserve church unity by accomodating heated differences over the ordination of women.** They issued a five-page statement which affirmed the ministry of Suffragan Bishop Barbara C. Harris of Massachusetts, the first female bishop in the worldwide Anglican Communion. The statement, which has no canonical authority, also declared that those within Anglicanism who oppose the ordination of women "hold a recognized theological passion." The House of Bishops says it desires to follow the international guidelines urging Anglicans to "live together" despite differences on matters of faith.
- **In New Mexico, four congregations of nuns have begun a joint effort to curb poverty in their area.** The Sisters have invested \$70,000 in the New Mexico Community Development Loan Fund, which was established to assist in creation of jobs and housing.
- The World Council of Churches is distributing a "study on sexuality and human relations" for testing before a final version is released next year. "Living in Covenant with God and One Another" deals with subjects like AIDS, divorce, domestic violence, homosexuality, singleness and abortion. The study notes that "women are calling for changes in attitudes, customs, laws" so that the equal worth and dignity of women and men is recognized. It also refers to the growing "exploitation of sexuality" used to "sell all kinds of products" and is linked in the media with violence and brutality.
- **The United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women reviewed oppressive issues in women's lives.** They learned that the issues are among the "central



theological and political issues of the 21st century. The Reverend Doctor Peggy Way, a Vanderbilt University professor, called upon the commission to listen to women particularly at the grassroots level, pay attention to history, and deal with the human viewpoint.

- **The United Methodist Church was advised not to take a "for" or "against" stand on abortion and its issues.** President Sally Ernst of the Board of Global Ministries said, "Church people need to challenge the systems that are dealing inadequately with the cause of unwanted pregnancies."
- **One of the first women to be ordained a Lutheran minister in the U.S.** describes herself as a "survivor of the church" as the 20th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Lutheran church approaches. Rev. Constance Parvey, a pastor near Burlington, Vt., says, "I do not think the ordained ministry is an easy profession for women or men, but I think it is twice as difficult for women."

Research tells us women do much better if they have come through male mentors, if their father or their husband was a pastor, or if they were a favorite of a male professor."

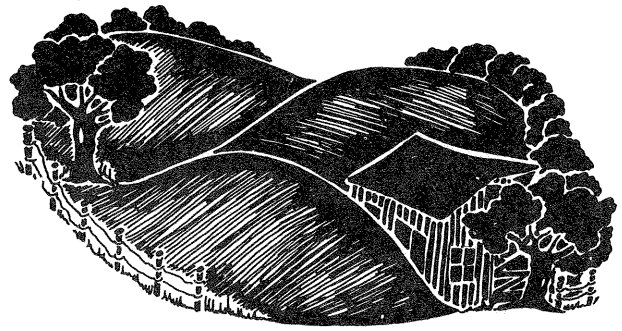
Pastor Parvey has done a research paper on the history of women in Christianity, and found "there was a lot more leadership by women in the early church than we ever recognized."

Currently women tend to be assigned to serve small churches, as associate pastors at larger churches, or not find a church at all.

- In Newfoundland, the Roman Catholic Church has held public hearings in the wake of the arrest, in the past year-and-a-half, of a score of **clergy and other church workers charged with sexual offences against children.** The first hearings against the accused United, Pentecostal, Salvation Army and Roman Catholic church workers revealed anger, frustration and a loss of faith among church members.
- The percentage of **women ordained to the full ministry**, in those denominations ordaining women, in the United States has increased from an estimated four percent in 1977 to almost eight percent in 1986, according to the **Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 1989.** Studies made by mainline denominations confirm that there is a great deal of resistance to the ordination of

women to the full ministry, that there is discrimination in salary between equally trained male and female clergy and that women clergy still largely occupy lesser positions in terms of leadership of large churches.

- The **10th Women in Ministry Conference** is being planned for March 30, 31 and April 1, 1990 in Fresno, Calif. The featured speaker is Katie Funk Wiebe on the theme, "Women Telling the Story." The weekend program will also include worship, Bible study, workshops, special interest groups and fellowship. Both women and men are invited. For information contact Val Rempel, 4879 East Butler, #103, Fresno, CA 93727. Telephone (209) 251-8628.
- **Broken Boundaries**, a new child sexual abuse packet prepared by the MCC Domestic Violence Task Force, is available from the MCC offices in Winnipeg, Kitchener, and Akron, Pa. **Broken Boundaries** is for those concerned about family life, for friends of people who were sexually abused as children and for sexually abused people themselves. Also available from MCC is **The Purple Packet**, a resource on spouse abuse. Copies of these packets are available for \$5 each.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in **REPORT** do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Shirley Stauffer Redekop. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

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